



NEWS RELEASE

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MS-13 Gang Member Convicted in Girl's 2001 Rape, Murder

An MS-13 gang member has been convicted in the 2001 murder of a 13-year-old Whittier girl, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced.

A jury found Jorge Palacios (dob 5/8/78) guilty yesterday of one count of first-degree murder, also finding true special circumstance allegations that the crime occurred in the commission of rape, lewd acts on a child and kidnapping. He also was convicted of one count of kidnapping to commit rape.

The jury found true gang and gun allegations.

Sentencing is scheduled for April 11 in Department 106 of the Foltz Criminal Justice Center. Palacios faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

A separate jury is considering the same charges against Rogelio Contreras (dob 8/22/77), Melvin Sandoval (dob 4/24/79) and Santos Grimaldi (dob 8/31/82). Grimaldi's charges include an allegation of personally using a gun.

Their trial is scheduled to resume Monday with the defense's closing arguments in Department 106.

On June 28, 2001, the naked body of Jacqueline Piazza was found in Elysian Park. She had been shot twice in the head.

Her murder remained unsolved for nearly a decade, until the Los Angeles Police Department's Robbery and Homicide Division, working with the Gang and Narcotics Division, uncovered new information and presented it to the District Attorney's Hardcore Gang Division. An indictment was unsealed in June 2012 charging the four men in the crime.

Prosecutors said the defendants kidnapped the victim the night before she was found and drove her to a remote area of the park, where they allegedly sexually assaulted and killed her.

Deputy District Attorneys Dayan Mathai, Rachel Greene and Mayra Ramirez are prosecuting case BA396138.

About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.